

23. Response to the Consultation

From the outset, it was clear to the Commission that the level of public knowledge of and corresponding interest in the subject matter of its enquiry was low. This was not surprising. There was a general feeling in the community of remoteness from the political process and a concern about a lack of consultation.

For example, the sentiment was clearly expressed by a Wangaratta resident:

I take an interest in politics...the thing that worries me...that people around me and I have been, in the past, too disillusioned....this forum here tonight has been excellentwhat you people have been expoundinghas been very helpful. You are speaking to us like we are your friends...people are disillusioned they do not know what's what. I wouldn't have a clue about the Legislative Council...I have learnt a lot here tonight and I can see that it's a necessary component of our government whether other places have it or not....It seems important for us that....ordinary people can have some input....and that an ordinary person is given a go to have an opportunity to express their views...

The regional consultation process began slowly, but built up steadily, in attendances, degree of community involvement and written submissions.

- Before the Discussion Paper was issued the Commission received submissions from academics and political commentators.
- After the paper was distributed, 195 written submissions were received.
- The seminars, public and other consultation processes involved over 600 people.
- The public consultation process across the State yielded 36 hours of recordings of the proceedings and 142 pages were later transcribed.
- 4,000 copies of the Consultation Paper were distributed.
- 304 completed questionnaires were received and analysed.
- Both the Discussion Paper and the Consultation Paper were available on line.
- A number of schools attended meetings and others have included constitutional reform in their first semester 2002 politics and social studies subjects, based on the Commission's published papers.

The Commission believes that the consultation process was thorough and useful. It is recognised that the benefit of constitutional reform is seen by individual citizens as far more amorphous than, for example, a water- pricing reform consultation which directly affects private benefits and losses. The numbers participating in the Commission's proceedings exceed those attracted to the House of Lords reform process in the United Kingdom.

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The table below extracts comparable statistics relating to the consultation processes undertaken by the Commission and the Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords. The United Kingdom figures have been adjusted for population to make them comparable to the Victorian response.

Activity	Victoria (actual)	United Kingdom (actual)	United Kingdom (adjusted for population)
Population	4.9 million (est 2001)	59.7 million (est 2001)	
Written Submissions	195	1,734	142
Attendance at Meetings & Discussions	600	1,026	84
Questionnaires	300	935	76

It is obvious from these data that Victorians have been much more engaged with the Commission's activities than their United Kingdom counterparts, notwithstanding the fact that the latter's institution is a national one of hundreds of years standing. Proportionally more submissions were received, more people attended the Commission's meetings and significantly more people responded to the Commission's questionnaire.

In summary, the Commission is confident that the formal and informal discussions and consultation with the wider community reflected a consistency of views, amply supporting the case for change and significant constitutional reform. The consultation process reinforces the Commissioners' conclusions contained in this report.